

## Message Text

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ACTION EB-07

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6515

INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

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DEPT PASS AGRICULTURE FOR MEEKER AND ANDERSON, FAS/W AND USIA

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAGR, ETRD, EGEN, AS

SUBJECT: MORE PROBLEMS ON USSR BEEF CONTRACT

1. LABOR DISPUTES IN THE VICTORIAN MEAT WORKS HAVE GIVEN RISE TO NEW CONCERN ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN MEAT BOARD'S POSITION IN FULFILLING THE REVISED USSR BEEF CONTRACT CALLING FOR THE DELIVERY OF 35,000 MT BEFORE THE END OF OCTOBER. ALTHOUGH THE 3000 MEAT WORKERS, WHO WERE STRIKING FOR A \$A60 A WEEK PAY CLAIM, RETURNED TO WORK ON SEPTEMBER 4, THERE WAS NO FIRM SETTLEMENT OF THE WAGE DISPUTE. THE BOARD IS CONCERNED ABOUT THE SITUATION AS THE CONTRACT PROVIDES PENALTIES FOR DEFAULT IN DELIVERY.

2. TO DATE 25,628 MT HAVE BEEN SHIPPED ON 8 DIFFERENT VESSLES. ONE SHIP SAILED DURING THE STRIKE WITH A SHORT LOAD FOR WHICH THE BOARD COULD BE ASSESSED A HEAVY SHORTAGE PENALTY. ALSO, DELAYS HAVE BACKED-UP SUPPLIES FILLING FREEZER CAPACITY IN SOME MEAT PLANTS. BONE-IN QUARTERS FOR THE USSR CONTRACT REQUIRE CONSIDERABLY MORE FREEZER SPACE THAN THE NORMAL BONELESS, BOXED BEEF. THE NEXT VESSEL IS NOT SCHEDULED TO LOAD OUT IN VICTORIA UNTIL SEPTEMBER 22 LEAVING SOME PLANTS SHORT OF FREEZER

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SPACE.

3. THE MEAT BOARD HAS SUFFICIENT SHIPPING SPACE BOOKED TO LOAD OUT THE REMAINING BEEF (3 SHIPS) AND PROVIDED THERE ARE NO MORE LABOR PROBLEMS, OFFICIALS ARE CONFIDENT THAT THE CONTRACT CAN BE FILLED BY THE DEADLINE. IN FACT, THE BOARD HAS AN ADDITIONAL 1,500 MT COMMITTED. THIS EXTRA BEEF WAS OFFERED TO THE SOVIETS, BUT THEY REFUSED IT PRESUMABLY BECAUSE THEY COULD GET BEEF CHEAPER IN OTHER MARKETS. COMMENT: THE USSR CONTRACT HAS BEEN A CONSTANT SOURCE OF IRRITATION TO THE BOARD. NOT ONLY HAVE THE VERY TIGHT SPECIFICATIONS BEEN DIFFICULT TO MEET, BUT THE PRICE WAS SO LOW THAT IT HAS ALREADY CALLED FOR A \$A3 MILLION GOVERNMENT "LOAN" TO FILL IT AND THERE COULD BE MORE LOSSES YET TO COME. COL. MCARTHUR WAS ESPECIALLY IRKED ABOUT THE LATEST PROBLEM AS MR. CURRAN, SECRETARY OF THE VICTORIAN MEAT EMPLOYEES UNION AND LEADER OF THE STRIKING WORKERS, WAS A MEMBER OF THE ORIGINAL TRADE MISSION TO USSR THAT WON THE INITIAL CONTRACT.

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